



South Carolina DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Hugh E. Weathers, Commissioner

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New Beef Co-op Aims to Expand Processing, Create SC Beef Product

A group of South Carolina cattle farmers has formed a cooperative association with the goals of increasing beef processing capacity in South Carolina and jointly creating a South Carolina-branded beef product.

The SC Beef Marketing Cooperative was formed with the assistance of the [South Carolina Center for Cooperative and Enterprise Development](#), a collaborative effort between the South Carolina Department of Agriculture, Clemson University Cooperative Extension, the South Carolina State Small Business Development Center and Matson Consulting.

South Carolina's meat processing facilities – all of which are small in scale – are unable to keep up with South Carolina beef producers' processing needs. The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed those weaknesses, with local facilities experiencing long backlogs at the same time consumers were seeking more local meat.

Steven Richards, director of the SC Center for Cooperative and Enterprise Development, completed a study last year suggesting that a \$3 million investment in six existing facilities could expand in-state processing capacity by 50 percent and create 50 new jobs.

"Processing capacity continues to be the most critical bottleneck to expanding the local meat supply. The second most important issue is to expand market outlets for local meat: more retail buying points and more offerings in grocery stores and restaurants. This cooperative association aims to work on both issues simultaneously," said Richards.

Creating a co-op gives the group a leg up in applying for grants, including the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Value-Added Producer Grant for which they have already applied. If awarded the grant, they plan to commission a feasibility study on expanding small beef processing facilities around the state to improve capacity.



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One of the co-op's eventual goals is to create a high-quality all-South Carolina ground beef product modeled after Kentucky Cattlemen's Ground Beef.

Expanding beef processing could also help preserve South Carolina's family farms, said Gwendolyn McPhail, treasurer of the co-op's board and owner of Black Diamond Sheep and Cattle in Seneca, South Carolina.

"We see a lot of open land in South Carolina that used to have cattle on it – but because there was not competitive pricing, because there was a processing backlog, a lot of smaller cattlemen have simply gone out of business," McPhail said. "I believe people will see new hope now in raising cattle and join us."

Kyle Player, executive director of the [Agribusiness Center for Research and Entrepreneurship](#) at the South Carolina Department of Agriculture, said the co-op is a promising model.

"This endeavor is a great example of how we can work together to promote entrepreneurship among South Carolina agribusinesses to help boost our state's rural areas," Player said.

The co-op is currently soliciting members from across South Carolina. Farmers who wish to join should contact McPhail at wagyu4you@gmail.com.

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